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## Viewing cable 09PANAMA879, Ambassador's November 25 Meetings with President, Vice

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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
09PANAMA879	2009-12-15 14:48	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Panama

Appears in these articles:

<http://www.mcclatchydc.com/2011/04/26/112845/cables-offer-dim-view-of-president.html>

VZCZCXYZ0550  
RR RUEHWEB

DE RUEHZP #0879/01 3491448  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
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FM AMEMBASSY PANAMA  
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SUBJECT: Ambassador's November 25 Meetings with President, Vice President, and Minister of the Presidency

REF: PANAMA 777; PANAMA 829; PANAMA 831

CLASSIFIED BY: Debra L. Hevia, Political Counselor, State, POL;  
REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

¶1. (C) Summary/Introduction: The Ambassador and DCM spent six hours in meetings with top government officials on November 25 to persuade them that neglecting to focus attention and resources on Panama's burgeoning crime and gang problems would be disastrous. The Martinelli Administration has taken on many tasks since July and it has not prioritized security issues. However, the window is narrow to reverse the alarming trend of rapidly increasing narco-trafficking and the related violence. (Note: Director of the Panama Canal Authority (ACP) Alberto Aleman recently told the Ambassador that in the past, the ACP assessed silting and other physical problems as the main threat to Canal operations. Recently that assessment shifted, and the ACP now considers violent crime and insecurity the major threat.) The Ambassador stressed that the GOP must address these issues with urgency before it is too late to bring the situation under control. Rather than hiring Israeli company Global CST to address security issues, Panama should understand that the U.S. is the logical partner in these efforts given our long-standing close relationship and the tremendous resources we have invested in Panama through many years. End summary/introduction.

The U.S. Is Panama's Partner

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¶2. (C) The Ambassador and DCM met first with Vice President/Foreign Minister Juan Carlos Varela and Minister of the Presidency Demetrio "Jimmy" Papadimitriu, after which they all joined President Ricardo Martinelli for lunch. The Ambassador explained once again that narco-trafficking is not a U.S. problem, as the government seems to believe. The top concern of Panamanian citizens is security; the Embassy's top priority in Panama is security; violence threatens long-term governance and prosperity; and Panama's best strategy is to push trafficking away from its shores and make it difficult for organized crime networks to operate. She assured the GOP that the Embassy would strongly support both aggressive efforts against traffickers, and robust programs to keep youth out of gangs. However, she expressed concern that many initiatives have been stalled due to divisions within the government or a lack of internal coordination, and in the case of the Council for Public Security and National Defense (Consejo), leadership that has worked directly counter to our bilateral information-sharing programs (ref A).

¶3. (C) The Ambassador detailed the many programs the USG provides to assist Panama on security issues, including NAS assistance, Coast Guard and Navy patrols, Southcom humanitarian and development projects, gang-prevention initiatives, and 30 U.S. federal law enforcement agents working side-by-side with Panamanian counterparts. The Ambassador underscored that Panama does not need to search for a partner on security issues; it already has one.

GOP: No Plan or Leadership on Security

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¶4. (C) Papadimitriu acknowledged the lack of GOP coordination, saying that there is no consensus about security and no plan to address it. He said the Ministry of Government and Justice (MOGJ) was too unwieldy, and that Minister Jose Raul Mulino did not have the full support and confidence of the government, but no one else wanted the job. Papadimitriu added, "We don't have anyone who wakes up thinking about security in the way you do. No one feels accountable or responsible." Martinelli ridiculed Mulino, saying that at Cabinet meetings he often talks for 20 minutes nonstop, with an attitude that he knows more than everyone else because he served in government previously, causing the other ministers to

stop listening and start working on their blackberries.

15. (C) The Ambassador asked who the GOP was considering naming as the new minister of security, and Martinelli admitted he had not thought about it, but it would not be Mulino. He said Director of the Panamanian National Police Gustavo Perez wanted to remain in his job, and Martinelli was happy to leave him there. The Ambassador and DCM urged Martinelli to choose a strong manager, who did not necessarily have to be a security expert.

#### Joint Task Force/Maritime Bases

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16. (C) The Ambassador detailed how our efforts to help the GOP stand up a small maritime task force that could operate off the Darien's Pacific coast using existing Panamanian security resources had spiraled into a vitriolic public debate about U.S. involvement in "maritime bases" (ref B). Papadimitriu was dismayed, and asked for a paper detailing the operation that the President could sign off on as a direct order to Mulino and the service chiefs. (Note: DCM provided a NAS-drafted paper the same afternoon, which Martinelli signed.) Papadimitriu had not paid close attention to the bases controversy but nor was he alarmed, as his internal polling showed most Panamanians were not greatly concerned about the bases. He agreed with the Ambassador and DCM that the GOP needed to have a credible spokesperson on security issues, and coordinate its messaging both internally and (where appropriate) with the Embassy.

#### Global CST and Israeli Involvement

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17. (C) The Ambassador expressed concerns about the proposals made by Israeli security company Global CST, citing negative experiences in Colombia and our inability to work with Israeli presence in GOP ministries (ref C and D). Varela said the GOP could solve its own problems without relying on contractors. Papadimitriu expressed surprise at the reports from Colombia, as he believed CST had been hired with Plan Colombia funds with the USG's blessing. He said he did not want to do anything to harm Panama's relationship with the U.S. and would ask CST president Ziv to stand down, though he later admitted it would be difficult since CST had spent its own money sending a large team to Panama to complete a survey. In particular, Papadimitriu was receptive to the argument that Panama did not need to buy expensive coastal radars or other hardware recommended by CST. However, he liked CST's ideas about creating a ministry of security and reorganizing the GOP security structure, as well as their suggestion to recruit management talent from the private sector. To sum up, Papadimitriu said he was shocked by the conversation, and would not let Israeli influence damage the U.S.-Panama relationship. Martinelli was similarly taken aback, and emphasized that he did not want to endanger relations with the USG, saying "We don't want to change friends." He said he would call Colombian President Uribe to get the straight scoop on CST.

#### Matador Judicialized Wiretap Program

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18. (C) Martinelli asked for additional wiretap assistance, saying the GOP needed to catch ordinary criminals in addition to drug trafficking organizations. The Ambassador and DCM suggested that our judicialized wiretap program could be expanded, but it must still be moved out from under the control of Consejo. If the GOP did not agree to put it under the control of the public ministry, perhaps it could be administered under police control.

## Moving Forward

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¶9. (C) The GOP and Embassy will continue this on-going dialogue

through a bi-weekly security meeting including Varela, Papadimitriu, and Mulino on one side and the Ambassador, DCM, and political-security officer on the other. Martinelli said that he, Varela, and Papadimitriu were the "circle zero" of the GOP, and that no important decisions were taken unless the three of them had discussed it and agreed on a course of action.

## Bio notes

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¶10. (C) In general, Martinelli seemed more relaxed overall and less aggressive than we have seen him in previous meetings. His general tone was respectful and positive, in contrast with his previous argumentative, drive-a-hard-bargain manner.

¶11. (C) Regarding the recent arrest of his cousin Ramon Martinelli in Mexico on money laundering charges, Martinelli said he was satisfied. If the Mexicans had not arrested him, the GOP had plans to arrest him. He said Ramon had always been a "black sheep" and was sullyng the good Martinelli family name.  
STEPHENSON